

# Attorney wants mentally handicapped man's sentence reconsidered

By DAVID WEISS  
Special to The Dallas Post

**WILKES-BARRE** — The attorney for a mentally handicapped man sent to a state prison last week wants the jail term reconsidered because his client had been found unfit to stand trial on new charges.

Warren Rensa, 39, was sentenced August 21 to one to three years in a state prison after a judge ruled Rensa violated his probation by lighting a fire inside his group home. New arson and related charges also were filed.

Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas Judge Michael Conahan sentenced the mentally handicapped man to one to three years in a state prison for

violating his probation by being arrested on arson charges.

Conahan imposed the state jail term, saying the county prison wouldn't be able to treat his mental illness as well as the state facility and Rensa, 39, will likely be sent to another mental facility.

"The state has facilities for the treatment of Mr. Rensa," Conahan said.

The ruling was viewed as a precautionary move by prosecutors and as unwanted, but necessary, one by Rensa's father, who said his son will be afraid in prison.

"He's scared," Carl Rensa said. Carl Rensa said his son is also afraid he won't be able to see his family.

"We're satisfied with the sen-

tence because ... it provides for the public's safety while it affords him the opportunity to receive the help that will be available at a state correctional institution," said Rensa's attorney, Charles Ross, after the sentence was announced.

Carl Rensa disagreed with the jail term but acknowledged something more had to be done for his son. He hopes the sentence is just a step in transferring Warren Rensa to a larger group home in Erie.

The Erie facility is on a 38-acre farm, away from neighbors and where Rensa would be able to do some work and keep himself busy and out of trouble, Carl Rensa said.

But Ross now says he was unaware at the time of the Aug. 21

hearing that Dr. Matthew Berger had declared Rensa unfit to stand trial. Someone deemed incompetent by a judge, based on a mental evaluation, can not be prosecuted.

Police said Rensa admitted setting a fire inside the Step By Step group home on Smith Pond Road in Jackson Township last month.

He was previously accused of setting two fires, and was charged in July 2001 with burglarizing a home and setting papers on fire inside a cabin. Police said Rensa broke into the properties after he walked away from the same group home in which he is accused of setting the fire. He pleaded guilty to burglary and other charges and was sentenced in September to

two years probation.

The arrest on the most recent arson charges and Rensa's alleged criminal behavior violated his probation, prosecutors said.

Court papers say Berger evaluated Rensa a few days before the Aug. 21 sentencing. Berger, based on the evaluation, said Rensa can not understand the charges and court proceedings.

"The client did not fully and rationally understand his situation," Berger wrote. "He was able to state what acts he committed to be arrested but did not understand the specific charges against him or their seriousness. Therefore, he was unable to truly understand the likely outcome. It is therefore my opinion that the client at this time is incompetent to stand trial."

Prior to his court hearing, Rensa, wearing handcuffs and rocking back and forth, politely spoke to deputy sheriffs and his father.

And after Conahan read the sentence, Rensa politely interrupted.

"Am I out?" Rensa asked Conahan.

The judge told Rensa that officials were going to try to get him into a hospital.

Rensa continued talking as the courtroom cleared.

"I'm in trouble," he said.

Ross said the incompetency finding could have affected Rensa's revocation sentence.

*This article appeared in original form in the Times Leader.*

# Scammers steal \$500 from 91-year-old woman's Franklin Twp. home

By JOLYN RESNICK  
Special to The Dallas Post

**FRANKLIN TWP.** — More than a week after two scam artists entered a 91-year-old woman's home and took \$500, the woman worries the men might come back.

"I'm scared," said Celia Fedor, of Mount Olivet Road. "I never was scared before."

Fedor says a man, posing as a township employee, came to her house at about 1 p.m. on Aug. 20 and said he was there to trim trees for the township. She said

the man wanted her to come outside to show her where her property ended.

She said she wouldn't go with him.

Fedor said the man, described as white, about 5 feet 8 inches tall, with a stocky build, asked: "How are you? Do you remember me? I was here a few years ago."

But, Fedor said, "I let the guy in. I believed him for a split second."

While she was talking to the man inside her home, Fedor said she heard something on the back porch. Believing something

was wrong, she asked the man to leave.

"He said he couldn't because he didn't write everything down," she said. "I asked him again to get out of my home, that he was making me nervous. Finally, I said, 'Get the hell out of my house.'"

After a few unsuccessful attempts to get the man to leave, she said she'd call the police. "In two seconds, the car was gone," she said.

Once he left, she called her neighbor and told her someone was in her house. The neighbor

helped her go through her home, and nothing appeared to be missing. She also called her niece, who contacted the police and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

PennDOT told the niece that they had people in the area doing work with trees. The news assuaged her a little.

That night, her nephew showed up to replace the mailbox. She said she wanted to give him money. She went into her bedroom, where she kept the cash, and found it was gone. She figures the person she saw

on her back porch must have taken the money while she was busy trying to get his friend out of her house.

"I almost dropped dead," Fedor said. "To me it's a fortune."

She said the incident "was a nightmare. ... My doors are still locked. You read about it, hear about it, but think it can never happen to you. I never thought it would happen up here."

Fedor said neighbors noticed a pickup parked near her mailbox.

There is no description on the truck, according to the state police at Wyoming.

State police are asking township residents to contact them at 826-5460 if they see people going door-to-door soliciting services. Police also warned elderly residents not to allow anybody they did not contact to enter their homes.

*This article appeared in original form in the Times Leader.*

# String of burglaries reported in Lehman Twp.

By BRIAN MALINA  
Special to The Dallas Post

**LEHMAN TWP.** — Police are investigating a string of burglaries in the township.

In the past two weeks, four homes and two businesses have been hit. In most, if not all, of the incidents the suspects entered by breaking a window, said Assistant Chief Sev Newberry.

Newberry would not release the addresses where the house burglaries occurred, but said they happened throughout the township, including one in Lake Silkworth, one in the Lehman Center area and one on Jackson Road.

All of the house burglaries occurred during the day and at homes that "were off the beaten path."

"They happened at places that you can't see from the road,"

Newberry said.

He said it appears the burglars targeted items that are easy to sell quickly such as jewelry or computers. Cash also has been taken, he said.

Newberry said he does not believe the house burglaries are linked to recent overnight break-ins at the Sunoco convenience store and Big 10 Pizza, both on state Route 118. Police do not have a suspect in any of the burglaries.

Bob Jones, owner of the Sunoco station, said someone smashed a window on a garage door to gain entry to the business early Sunday morning. He said \$250, eight packs of cigarettes and 14 lotto tickets were stolen.

The suspects also managed to enter the building without setting off two motion detectors, Jones said.

Kingston Township Police Chief James Balavage said his township also has had one burglary recently.

Mary's Flower Garden, 131 N. Main St., in the township's Shavertown section, was burglarized on Aug. 14. The suspect took \$50 in rolled change and \$20 in loose change, he said.

Newberry suggested that residents who own computers, guns or other items that have a serial number, write the number down in case the item is stolen. He said having the serial number will help to identify the item if it is recovered and allow police to place the number in a nationwide computer system to track in case it's recovered out of the area.

For items without serial numbers, Newberry suggested residents monogram, engrave or somehow mark an item so they

can identify it.

The recent burglaries come about one year after a teenage crime spree included at least 43 thefts and three burglaries. Four of the people involved in that spree were remanded to the Luzerne County Juvenile Detention Center. Two others were sentenced to probation.

*This article appeared in original form in the Times Leader.*

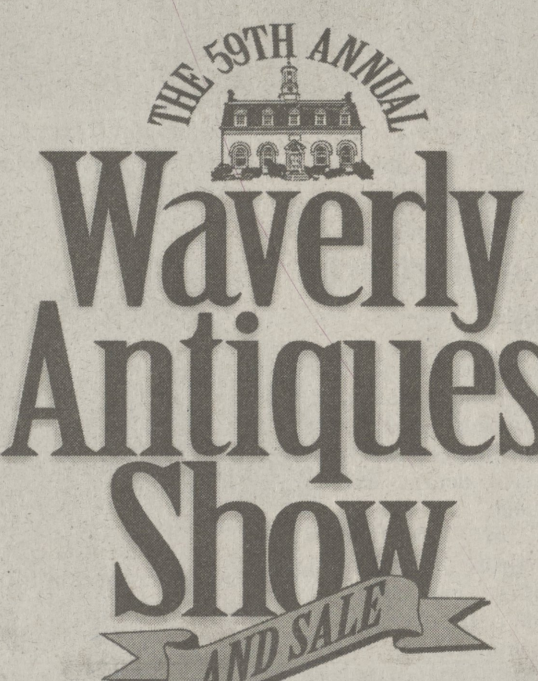
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